

FITNESS

Exercise Tips

1. Be sure to get at least 30 minutes of activity that makes you breathe harder on most or all days of the week. That's called "endurance activity," because it builds your energy or "staying power." You don't have to be active for 30 minutes all at once. Ten minutes of endurance activity at a time is fine. Just make sure those 10-minute sessions add up to a total of 30 minutes most days.

How hard do you need to push yourself? One doctor describes the right level of effort this way: If you can talk without any trouble at all, you're not working hard enough. If you can't talk at all, it's too hard.

2. Keep using your muscles. When muscles aren't used, they waste away at any age. How important is it to have "enough" muscle? Very! When you have enough muscle, you can get up from a chair by yourself. When you don't—you have to wait for someone to help you. When you have enough muscle, you can walk through the park with your grandchildren. When you don't, you have to stay home. That's true for younger adults as well as for people age 90 and older.

Keeping your muscles in shape can help prevent another serious problem in older people—falls that cause problems like broken hips. When the leg and hip muscles that support you are strong, you're less likely to fall. Even if you do fall, you will be more likely to be able to get up on your own. And using your muscles may make your bones stronger, too.

3. Do things to help your balance. For example, stand on one foot, then the other. If you can, don't hold on to anything for support. Stand up from sitting in a chair without using your hands or arms. Every now and then walk heel-to-toe. When you walk this way, the toes of the foot in back should almost touch the heel of the foot in front.
4. Stretch. Stretching can help keep you flexible. You will be able to move more freely. Stretch when your muscles are warmed up. Never stretch so far that it hurts.

